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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed the dinner-table discourse in a Caucasian-American, upper-middle-class two-parent family with children aged seven (female) and eight (male) for evidence of how family narrative practices socialize children into family, social, and cultural membership. It is also proposed that discourse in families both indexes and constitutes particular social roles and identities assumed by family members. It was found that the roles and identities of problem-solver, incompetent, and entertainer were co-constructed, resisted, and reconstituted in the course of an everyday narrative. It is suggested, further, that this process reconstitutes social hierarchies that privilege men over women and parents over children at a macro level, despite resistance at the micro level. It is concluded that the study illustrates how roles are first acquired and later maintained in the stream of talk through specific narrative strategies, and how in turn those roles become implicated in co-constructed relationships of unequal power distribution, reinforcing the notion that power is not static but must be continuously sustained and negotiated in ongoing discourse. Contains 18 references. (Author/MSE)

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"Again, Another Solution by Daddykins!" Socializing Family Roles in Narrative

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Family narrative practices socialize children into membership in families and into membership in society and culture (Ochs, 1986; Heath, 1989). In addition, discourse in families both indexes and constitutes particular social roles and identities assumed by family members. Using a micro-level discourse analysis of a videotaped dinner in a Caucasian-American, upper-middle-class two-parent family with an eight-year-old son and a seven-year-old daughter, I examine how, for example, roles (and identities) of problem-solver, incompetent and entertainer get co-constructed, resisted and reconstituted in the course of an everyday narrative in ways which I suggest, not coincidentally, reconstitutes social hierarchies which privilege men over women, and parents over children at a macro-level, despite resistance at the micro-level. This study deepens our understanding of how roles are first acquired and, later, maintained in the stream of talk through specific narrative strategies, and of how those roles, in turn, become implicated in co-constructed relationships of unequal power distribution (Ochs & Taylor, 1992). This analysis also reinforces the notion that power is not static but rather, has to be continuously sustained and negotiated in ongoing discourse.

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Socializing Family Roles in Narrative

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It is primarily through verbal interaction that we communicate with one another and first gain an understanding of ourselves and others as social beings. Ochs (1986) asserts that sociocultural information is generally "encoded in the organization of conversational discourse" and that language is "a major, if not the major tool for conveying sociocultural knowledge and a powerful medium of socialization" (p. 3). It follows then that in order to understand more about how children are socialized into culturally appropriate ways of behaving, it is necessary to deepen our understanding of how talk functions in families. In this paper, I look at how, for example, a role (and identity) of problem-definer and problem-solver gets co-constructed, resisted, reconstituted and sustained through everyday family talk in a way which, I suggest, not coincidentally, reconstitutes patriarchal relations despite resistance at the micro-level.

Social roles are commonly considered attributes of a person's status. MacIntyre (1981), for example, writes, "We enter human society... with one or more imputed characters - roles into which we have been drafted - and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed" (p. 201). However, in the family, for instance, having a child does not automatically guarantee that one will behave like a parent. That is, in order to maintain the social role and identity of "parent," an adult has to interactionally construct the verbal and non-verbal behaviors normally associated with being one. Thus social roles are not given, but rather need to be sustained in ongoing verbal and

non-verbal behavior. The purpose of this paper is to lead to a deepened understanding of how social roles are maintained in the stream of talk through specific narrative strategies, and how those roles, in turn, become implicated in co-constructed relationships of unequal power distribution.

Database

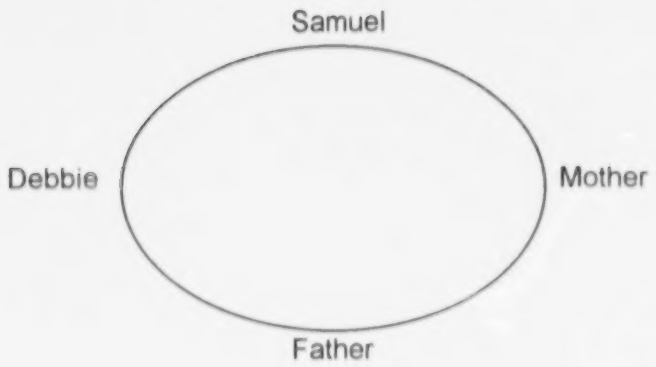
Data for this study were collected in the home of a middle-class, English-speaking, Anglo-American family consisting of a husband and wife and their two children. Both parents work full-time; the father is the director of a local company and the mother is a teacher in a local middle school. Their older child is an eight-year-old boy and their younger one is a seven-year-old girl. The family were acquaintances of an acquaintance of mine and were not known to me prior to my visiting them in their home. The analysis that follows is based on video- and audiotaped segments of one of the family's dinner-time conversations. It focuses, in particular, on about two minutes of continuous talk which occurred about twenty minutes after the children had sat down to their evening meal. Mother, who had cooked the dinner, was the last person to sit down. She was in the midst of eating when Father reached over in line 6 to examine a stain on her sleeve:

Analysis

Mud narrative

M = Mother S = Samuel (8;10) 3rd Grade

F = Father D = Debbie (7;5) 2nd Grade



01 F; Other than MSG? ((sniffs and puts napkin to mouth))

02 (0.2) ((family members are eating))

03 M; No - not added.

04 F; No:?=

05 M; =No - I told them - restaurants do that now

06 F; Wha't cha got? little ((reaching over to touch M's sleeve)) -

07 speckles from coo?kin

08 ((F and S are staring intently at M's blouse))

09 M; m?m ((shakes head no))

10 (0.2) ((S is staring at M))

11 M; ((facing F)) I am co:vered in mu:d from your puppies

12 (0.2) ((F raises eyebrows, then resumes eating))

13 S; Her-hi::s ((in animated tone))

14 [

15 M; When I'm home at lu?nchtime- You know how I'm home -

16 real brief just to let them out an eat (.) an uhm ((shaking right hand

17 emphatically)) (0.4) let them back in to leave, it's like eighteen

18 minutes,

19 M; (0.4) ((shaking head no)) I uhm I simply did not have- I

20 ran back to the bedroom to see: if I could jus - put another blouse

21 on - an there really wasn't anything that would really really go

22 with it that wasn't short sleeves so I just decided (0.4) ((shaking

23 head no, moving left hand emphatically)) too much wo:?rk ((half-

24 laughing)) So it's speckles of mud

25 F; Well, that's a shame ((softly, while continuing to eat))

26 [ ]

27 M; I might give it to Samuel tonight with his good Sharks Jersey

28 (0.6) ((S looks up briefly; F starts shaking head no))

The initiating event of the mud narrative is the gaze of Father, who suddenly notices some stains on his wife's blouse and proposes a theory as to how they got there. Mother responds to Father's question by explicitly refuting his theory that the "speckles are from coo?kin'" and by supplying their correct origin: "I am co: vered in mu:d from your puppies" (line 11)[1]. Though both parents own the puppies, Mother's suggestion

[1] Transcription conventions after Sachs, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974).

that the puppies belong to her husband seems to be a way of insinuating that he is partly responsible for the stains. Such an insinuation may be picked up by the son, who prior to this had been conversing with his sister. He suddenly enters his parents' conversation by noting in an animated tone, with a self-repair, this apparent discrepancy: "Her-hi::s" (line 13). Father, however, does not comment, though his non-verbal gesture, raised eyebrows, suggests that the comment was noted by him.

Whether or not Mother interprets Father's raised eyebrows and his lack of verbal response in line 12 as disapproval and feels the need to explain her actions further, or whether she merely wants to keep the conversation going is not clear, but in any case, she launches into a narrative to explain what she did and why (lines 15-24).[2] The point of Mother's narrative seems to be that, much as she hated going back to teach with a dirty blouse, given her time constraints and the lack of appropriate substitutes, she felt she had no alternative. Her narrative focuses on the setting and her attempts to deal with the outcome and perhaps show herself as a problem-solver, rather than the initiating event itself, how exactly the mud got onto her blouse in the first place (Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph & Smith, 1992).

Her narrative succeeds in provoking a verbal response from Father: "Well, that's a !shame!" (line 25). Here "well" could be operating as a pre-disagreement marker (Pomerantz, 1984) and background repair in response to Mother's earlier lament (line 11) that she is covered in mud from *his* puppies. His choice of impersonal

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[2] Pamela Fishman (1983) and DeFranchisco (1989) argue that in private talk, women have to do a disproportionate amount of work if they want to maintain a conversation with men.

consolatory exclamation, "that's a shame", uttered softly, also suggests that he is attempting to distance himself from any responsibility for the speckles of mud and perhaps drop the topic. In any case, it is difficult to gauge how much attention is paid to Father's brief interjection, since it is completely overlapped by Mother's utterance, in line 27, stating the course of action she will take regarding the dirty blouse, once again, posing herself as a problem solver. Father does not respond directly to Mother's presentation of herself as problem-solver, but rather, after a short pause (line 28), re-problematizes her actions, criticizing the behavior which he assumes led to the mud on her blouse:

29 F; Well- ((shakes head no))
30 ((S and D gaze from M to F, S is staring at F))
31 S; ((to F)) I push(ed) them do?wn I don't think-
32 [
33 F; ((speaking emphatically)) Until the rest of the family-
34 [
35 M; ((to F shaking head no)) It ca:n't be helped.=
36 F; =Yes it it yes yes it ca:n ((with one emphatic nod yes))
37 [
38 M; It ca:n't be helped. ((looking down at plate, shaking head
39 no. S and D still gazing from M to F))
40 M; ((still shaking head no)) The backyard is just full of mud

41 It's raining all day long

42 [ ]

43 F; Until the rest of the family insists on treating the

44 dogs the way I treat the dogs and making them

45 stay down all the ti?me - and ru:?le them - ((shaking head

46 no)) (0.4) (then) you're going to suffer that=

47 M; ((shakes head no))

48 F; =for the rest of the time they're here ((with emphatic tone))

49 [

50 M; You misunderstoo:d ((shaking head

51 no)) That's not what happened They came in and they did what

52 ((shaking head no)) naturally dogs do They shook to get the

53 water off of them It was raining ((shaking head yes))

54 F; Why were you standing next? to them

55 M; I wasn't ((shaking head no)) I was closing the door I was on my

56 way that's how much it flew. ((shaking head yes))

57 (0.4) ((S snickers then turns to M))

58 S; hh- (hmhmhm) ((humming, smiling and waving arms above head

59 and looking at M -imitating mud flying?))

60 M; ((smiles and nods yes to S))

61 D; ((gazes at S and makes similar gestures and sounds)) (hmhmhmh)

Father, in line 29, again opens his turn with the word "well". This time, the word appears to function not just as a background repair and pre-disagreement marker but also as an attempt by Father to hold the floor so that he can formulate a lengthier response, which he undertakes in line 31. In line 31, Samuel takes the floor during a very brief pause in his father's talk. His short remark to Father ("I push(ed) them do?wn I don't think-") suggests a possible attempt to align himself with Father by displaying that he is already treating the dogs in the manner preferred by Father. It is not clear, however, whether his utterance is heard by Father since Father overlaps his son's talk in line 33, elaborating the pre-disagreement displayed in line 29.

Father, however, does not get to complete his utterance in line 33. Instead, he is interrupted by Mother, in line 35, displaying that she heard his "well" as disagreement and rejecting his problematizing of the family's behavior. Her use of the impersonal passive construction in saying: "It can't be helped," serves to distance herself from the problem of the mud and to support her contention that nothing can be done about it, i.e., the dirt in the house is not caused by anyone's negligence, that is, she is not someone who is incompetent. In line 38, Mother, emphasizes her rejection by repeating her assertion, averting her gaze and shaking her head no. In addition, she supplies an explanation as to why she thinks nothing can be done about the mud (line 40). In line 43, Father having rejected Mother's assertion in line 35, repeats and extends his earlier utterance begun in line 33, asserting that they can solve the mud problem by disciplining the dogs. In offering his first suggestion, Father sets up his own dog-

handling skills as superior to the skills of other family members whom he casts in a sorry light and poses himself as problem-solver that others should pay heed to.

When Father finally completes his utterance in line 48, it seems possible that both he and Samuel (line 31) have the same explanation for the mud on Mother's blouse, i.e., that she did not discipline the dogs sufficiently to "stay down," or that, at least, Samuel correctly anticipated what Father was going to say. Father chose to formulate his own theory of how the mud got onto the blouse because this information, as noted above, was not supplied in Mother's earlier narrative explanation (lines 15-23).

In line 50, Mother responds to Father's pronouncement with what Ochs and Taylor (1992c) have characterized as a "veridical challenge" when she says "You misunderstood." Father has misanalyzed the problem she faced as a protagonist. She counter-problematizes Father's proposed solution to the mud problem on the grounds that it does not fit the facts. She did not get muddy because she allowed the dogs to jump up, rather she got muddy through no fault of her own or the dogs, who were just being dogs ("...they did what naturally dogs do... lines 50-53). In so doing, she further strengthens her contention that the problem is irresolvable and therefore, was not caused by something she did or did not do.

Mother's problematizing is different in nature from Father's, because it is more a form of resistance of *his* problematizing of her as a protagonist by counter-problematizing him as narrator: "Your interpretation is wrong" (Ochs and Taylor, 1992b, p. 458) than it is a problematization of his own behavior as protagonist. This is

in contrast to the continued insinuation of incompetence in Father's renewed problematizing of Mother's behavior as a protagonist with the face-threatening (Brown and Levinson , 1978) quip in line 54: "Why were you standing next? to them," which displays both an assent to her version of the facts, i.e., an acceptance that the problem wasn't due to her failure to discipline the dogs, and yet a rejection of her assertion that nothing can be done about it. This pattern of interaction is in keeping with Ochs and Taylor's (1992b) research which suggested that Fathers tended to problematize Mothers more as protagonists, and Mothers tended to respond by counterproblematizing Fathers as narrators. It also supports Ochs and Taylor's (1992a) finding that "[N]arratives about co-present family members can turn into judgmental reckonings of their actions and stances" (p. 309). In other words, elicited or volunteered personal narratives can be, and frequently are, utilized by other participants in the interaction to criticize the teller.

In line 55, Mother again defends her behavior. She responds by rejecting the insinuation that her muddy blouse is due to her standing too close to the dogs, , "I wasn't ((shaking head no)) I was closing the door I was on my !way! that's how much it flew." Her attributing agency to the mud -that it flew-, serves again to emphasize her stance that the mud problem is beyond human control. Again, in choosing to respond to his interrogation of her past time behavior by counterproblematizing his interpretation and defending her actions, Mother is also implicitly sustaining the co-construction of Father's role as problematizer of past time behavior (and problematizee

of narration) and hers as problematizee of behavior (and problematizer of present time narration). Instead of defending her own past time behavior, she could, for example, have problematized his, by reminding him of a time when *his* behavior had been problematic or suggesting that some earlier action of his caused this mud problem (e.g., "Why didn't you ever build the dog shed?").

The children, though silent throughout most of the parent's conversation about the mud, have been following the interaction with their gaze (lines 8, 10, 28, 30, 31, 39, 57). Samuel did seem to try to take part in the conversation earlier in lines 13 and 31 but his comments passed unacknowledged. The notion of the active nature of mud implied in mother's utterance in lines 55-56, seems to amuse him and he again takes the floor. He chuckles, makes eye-contact with Mother, and verbally and non-verbally imitates the flying mud. Mother's gestures in line 60 indicates that she is paying attention to him. At this point (line 61), Debbie looks toward her brother and also starts to gesture and make noises, presumably in imitation of her brother's behavior:

61 D; ((gazes at S and makes similar gestures and sounds)) (hmhmhmh)
62 [
63 F; Well
64 then ((clears throat, turning to M)) Allow me to make a
65 suggestion. - If this is a problem that can't be so?lved and is going
66 to be in the way rather than your besmirching your
67 professional appearance by having mud all over your nice clo?thes

68 [

69 ((M looks up to stare at F. S also stares at F))

70 ((M starts looking away from F))

71 F; then take a: - sheet and put it over the do:g's ca:?ge ((shaking

72 head no)) let them in let them shake and it won't get o?n you

73 (0.4) ((S and M both nod head questioningly?))

74 S; ((in ironic?tone)) Agai?n ano?ther solu?tion by: daddyki?ns

75 [

76 ((F looks up briefly))

77 (0.6) ((M laughs))

78 M; That's? a solution bu:t ((turning to F and shaking head doubtfully))

79 - with a minute to spare I wasn't really thinking about

80 ((laughing)) putting a sheet over their cage but there's a solution -

81 for the future ((turns to face F and shakes head yes)) - for the

82 next rainy day. ((Keeps shaking head yes))

83 S; (Heading back) to the future ((to M, in joking voice))

84 F; Coz it-

85 [

86 M; I'll put- I'll put that away for a rainy day. ((gazing at S))

Father's first analysis and recommendation in lines 43-48 had been quickly rejected by Mother on the grounds that they did not fit the facts. In lines 63-71, Father, now with a more accurate idea of what happened, proposes another solution. His request that he be "allowed" to "make a suggestion" and his word choice of "besmirch" (line 64) again gives his speech a more formal tone than the preceding talk perhaps suggesting that it should be taken more seriously.

Father's solution (lines 69-70) is that Mother should cover the dogs' cage (which is indoors in the family-room) with a sheet, so as to prevent mud from flying out onto people and objects in the vicinity. (He is, however, making several assumptions, such as, the dogs won't shake until they get into their cage and that they will go directly from the garden to it.)

Father's concern about his wife's "besmirching her professional appearance" evokes Foucault's (1980) notion of the panopticon. Father's interactional behavior seems to exemplify what Ochs and Taylor (1992a) term a "panopticon-like manner," whereby stories about and by family members are vulnerable to the critique of other family members. This is seen from the outset when Father first notices the mud, defines it as a problem, and evokes a story about it by providing his own presumptive explanation, a story which allows him to monitor not only the present condition of her blouse but also the past-time actions that led to the present condition, revealing that Mother also wore the muddy blouse to work. Like Foucault (1980), Ochs and Taylor (1992a) emphasize the unequal distribution of power in such interactions. They note,

for example, that fathers more often than other family members in their data tended to assume the panopticon role or a panopticon-like manner, and children more often than parents, Mothers more than Fathers, were liable to have their actions and behaviors laid bare to scrutiny.

In line 73, the line following Father's suggestion that she cover the cage, Mother nods her head in a way that could be interpreted as indicating doubt. In any case, her silence suggests that it may be a trouble source for her. Davidson (1984) notes: "Silences occurring immediately after an invitation, offer, request, or proposal may be taken as displaying that it is possibly going to be rejected" (p. 103).

Samuel also nods his head in a way that suggests that he too is appraising Father's suggestion. Though he has been silent since line 56, he again takes advantage of a brief pause in the talk to enter the conversation, this time with the utterance: "Agai?n ano?ther solu?tion by Daddyki?ns" (line 72). His remark is ambiguous. The words taken literally suggest that his remark be understood as a compliment, another example of Samuel trying to align himself with his father as in line 31. Alternatively, what seems to be an ironic tone could indicate a put-down, something like: "Here he goes again!" In this case, Samuel's use of a term of endearment ("daddykins") could possibly be intended to mitigate against its interpretation as a challenge. If we look at uptake, Mother's laughter suggests that it might have been intended to tease or amuse. In any case, Samuel's utterance seems also to be indicative of his understanding of the socialization of roles and identities. His choice of the words "again," and "another"

(line 72) reinforce the fact that Father has offered solutions before. They explicitly display Samuel's awareness of Father's role as problem-solver. With this utterance, Samuel is indexing and constituting Father in that role. It also illustrates the different levels that utterances simultaneously operate on. Samuel is both making a contribution to the ongoing conversation (and possibly a bid to be more involved in it) and also making a shrewd metacomment on the roles and behaviors assumed.

As with Samuel's earlier turns, Father does not respond verbally, though his gaze (line 76) seems suggests that he has been paying attention to his son's comment. Mother laughs. There is a brief pause, then Mother offers a response to Father's solution. Mother's hesitant acknowledgment of Father's suggestion (line 76, line 78-79) as a viable solution ("that's? A solution bu:t" and "there's a solution - for the !future!"), is face-saving and also softens her ensuing resistance to it and is in keeping with participants' preference for agreement (Pomerantz, 1984). Though Mother accepts the problem as correctly defined this time, she goes on to problematize Father's solution on grounds of practicality (Ochs and Taylor 1992). Once again, Mother's response is more an example of defending her actions than it is a problematization of Father's own behavior either as narrator or protagonist. Samuel's response (line 81) is to, again, enter the interaction by way of a comedic utterance addressed to Mother: "(!Heading! !back!) to the future." Mother gazes at him. Again, neither parent responds to Samuel's turn verbally. Instead they go on to respond to each other's comments, as if treating the kids as onlookers rather than contributors to the conversation.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze in detail the remainder of the family problem-solving about the muddy dogs, which goes on for five more minutes. The rest of the conversation does, however, proceed in much the same manner: Father proposes another two solutions, each of which is in response to his reformulated understanding of the problem as a result of Mother's resisting his previous solutions. For the most part, the parents continue as exclusive dyad as if Samuel and Debbie are not ratified participants in their parents' conversation. Samuel does attempt to join the conversation at several additional points, but he seems to be learning that he will only receive attention when his interactional contributions are entertaining or when there is a conversational lull. His comments are not taken up in the conversation and they thus seem to display that he presents and reconstitutes his identity as a narrator-jokester.

As my analysis has argued, Father turns a family narrative into a forum for problematizing the behavior of other family members, Mother in particular, on the grounds of incompetence and for demonstrating his own superior knowledge. Langellier and Peterson (1993) suggest, "family narrative practices legitimate meanings and power relations that privilege, for example, parents over children, males over females, and the white, middle-class families over alternative family structures" (p. 50). In this family, it seems plausible that in this narrative, the practices displayed did seem to privilege parents over children and males over females as narrators. Father assumed more powerful social roles such as judge and monitor and more powerful narrative roles such as problematizer of protagonist's behavior and primary recipient of

narratives. From the outset, he instigated and drove the need for narrative explanation. Other family members assumed weaker social and narrative roles, Mother as monitored subject and problematizee, Samuel as entertainer. This finding is also in keeping with the work of Ochs and Taylor (1992a, 1992b).[3]

The family conversational interaction analyzed above could also be viewed as an instance of what Ochs and Taylor (1992a, 1992b) labeled the "Father-knows-best" dynamic. This is a practice whereby "the father is typically set up--through his own and others' recurrent narrative practices--as primary audience, judge, and critic of family members' actions, thoughts, feelings, and conditions either as a narrative protagonist (acting in the past) or as a co-narrator (acting in the present)" (1992b, p. 447). However, though there has been complicity, there has also been resistance to father assuming the role of all-knower.

The work of Gramsci (1971) and Giroux (1983) shows that where there is hegemony, there is also resistance. This resistance is evidenced in the analysis above in the behavior of Mother, who, in spite of orienting toward less powerful social and narrative roles, could and did challenge Father's effective power, i.e., his ability in a face-to-face interaction to gain compliance (Ervin-Tripp et al, 1984). If Samuel's comment in line 52 is interpreted as a sarcastic put-down, this would suggest the possibility that Mother and the children are also resisting Father's control by alliance building. In earlier turns Samuel has directed his utterances at Mother and received

[3] See Ochs and Taylor (1992a, p.325) and Ochs and Taylor (1992b, p. 457) for tables illustrating divisions of narrative roles.

feedback from her. In line 52, it is possible that he is again aligning himself with her as they together resist Father's proposed solution.

Using micro-level discourse analytic techniques to talk about power is, however, problematic since in addition to power's being entangled in pre-existing status differences which have to be continually reconstituted, it is also bound up in meaning and intentions--constructs which are problematic to identify from transcriptions alone. However, if one accepts that power, rather than simply being a static property embodied in high-status individuals, is also fluid and shifting (Foucault, 1980) and has to be negotiated within talk on a turn-by-turn basis, then there should be some way to investigate its effects if one can settle on a satisfactory way to articulate those negotiations. I argue in this paper that the assumption of roles (and their characteristic behaviors) instantiates such an articulation.

This paper has attempted to further understanding of how socio-cultural information is encoded in everyday narrative in a turn by turn process, how the intersections of language, power and social roles work together to create an unequal distribution of power, one which tends to favor males over females and parents over children. As noted earlier, though some social roles do carry higher status, power is not just a static property, it also has to be continuously sustained and negotiated in ongoing discourse. Spender (1980, p. 3) asserts that language is a "major and crucial part of the process," of constructing our "social reality" so that "men achieve dominance in our daily lives." As my analysis has suggested, dinner-time conversation

can provide an opportunity for socializing and sustaining culturally appropriate ways of behaving.[4] It can also provide an opportunity for studying "how patriarchy functions," how people "do dominance" and how identities are reinstantiated through representational practices where family members jockey for roles and identities as protagonists and narrators.

[4] Furthermore, at the same time that talk is being used to socialize children into social roles in the family, researchers such as Ervin-Tripp, O'Connor and Rosenberg (1984), Pellegrini, Brody and Stoneman (1987) show that it is simultaneously being used to establish patterns of behavior which extend their influence far beyond the confines of the family. Indeed, it seems likely that these early lessons in social behavior are foundational to social control in society at large.

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